

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

February 2021

Early Childhood

Question:

What are the benefits of transitional kindergarten programs?

Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on transitional kindergarten programs.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in sections with sources in each section in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Berlin, L. J., Dunning, R. D., & Dodge, K. A. (2011). Enhancing the transition to kindergarten: A randomized trial to test the efficacy of the "Stars" summer kindergarten orientation program. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 26(2), 247–254.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ918774>. Retrieved from
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51691426>

From the abstract: "This randomized trial tested the efficacy of an intensive, four-week summer program designed to enhance low-income children's transition to kindergarten (n's = 60 program children, 40 controls). Administered in four public schools, the program focused on social competence, pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills, school routines, and parental involvement. Hierarchical linear modeling indicated that the program significantly improved teachers' ratings of (a) the transition to the social aspect

of kindergarten for girls (but not boys); and (b) the transition to kindergarten routines for the subgroup of children who had the same teacher for kindergarten as for the summer program. Findings are discussed in terms of practices and policies for supporting children's transition to school.”

Doss, C. (2019). How much regulation? A fuzzy regression discontinuity analysis of student literacy skills in prekindergarten vs. transitional kindergarten. *Education Finance and Policy*, 14(2), 178–209. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1211693>

From the ERIC abstract: “A growing body of research provides evidence that quality early childhood experiences can affect a host of life outcomes. Equally well documented is the variation in the quality of prekindergarten (pre-K) programs offered to children. In this study, I use a fuzzy regression discontinuity approach to evaluate the efficacy of transitional kindergarten (TK) on student outcomes in the San Francisco Unified School District. TK is a highly regulated, state-funded, early education program. Importantly, universal pre-K was already established in San Francisco, making this study a comparison of pre-K opportunities. This study tests whether a more highly regulated pre-K program, situated solely in schools, can provide benefits to young five-year-olds over a modern, robust universal pre-K market. I find that students who attended TK outperform their peers on a variety of foundational literacy skills, with some evidence the gains are larger for minority children. TK, however, had little effect on the rate of absences in kindergarten and first grade.”

REL Southwest Note: A free version of this article is available as a working paper at <https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/wp16-07-v201703.pdf>

Little, M. H., Cohen-Vogel, L., & Curran, F. C. (2016). Facilitating the transition to kindergarten: What ECLS-K data tell us about school practices then and now. *AERA Open*, 2(3), 1–18. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1194396>

From the ERIC abstract: “Leveraging data from two nationally representative cohorts from the ECLS-K (Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten), we examine the types of transition practices that schools use to ease children’s adjustment to formal schooling. The transition to kindergarten is a critical juncture in a child’s life that entails a host of social, behavioral, and academic changes. We find a modest increase between the two cohorts in the number of transition practices that schools offer children and their families, although we also find that fewer of these practices are offered in traditionally underserved schools. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings and suggest areas for future research.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

TKCalifornia – <https://tkcalifornia.org/>

From the website: “Transitional kindergarten (TK) is one of the first steps California’s youngest schoolchildren take in their academic careers – and new updates to education policy now make it possible to serve more children in TK! On TKCalifornia, you can learn more about the Expanded TK opportunity, as well as valuable, easy to use support

and tips for teaching and administering high-quality TK that will get your students off to a strong start!”

REL Southwest Note: Two TK resources can be found using the following links:

Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Planning Guide: A Resource for Administrators of California Public School Districts – https://tkcalifornia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/TKGuide_11311_Web.pdf

Transitional Kindergarten Implementation Guide: A Resource for California Public School District Administrators and Teachers – <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/em/documents/tkguide.pdf>

California Department of Education (CDE) – <https://www.cde.ca.gov/>

From the website: “The Department of Education serves our state by innovating and collaborating with educators, schools, parents, and community partners. Together, as a team, we prepare students to live, work, and thrive in a multicultural, multilingual, and highly connected world.”

REL Southwest Note: Frequently asked questions regarding California’s TK program can be found here: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/em/kinderfaq.asp>

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- “transitional kindergarten” benefits
- “transitional kindergarten” value
- “transitional kindergarten” effects
- “transitional kindergarten” impact
- “transitional kindergarten” outcomes
- Effects (transitional kindergarten)
- transitional kindergarten

Databases and Resources

We searched [ERIC](#) for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.8 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2006 to present were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.
- *Methodology:* The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.